



Nature's Call

An Activity Newsletter for Kids by Utah's Project WILD -- Spring 1995



What's in a Wetland?

From the small phantom midge to the great blue heron, wetlands are home to all kinds of wild animals. If you visit a wetland and look closely, you will discover some fascinating creatures.

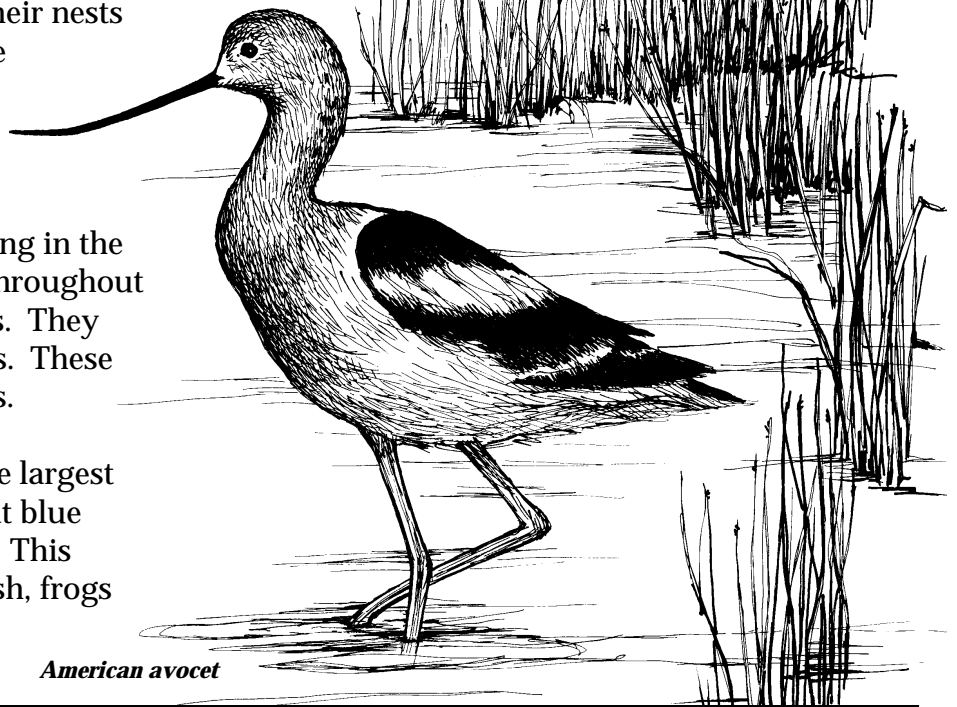
Two common wetland insects with uncommon names are the phantom midge and the water boatman. The phantom midge looks like a mosquito. This midge gets its name because as a larva, it is almost transparent! The water boatman was named for its two very long legs which are used just like paddles. This insect will attach itself to plants at the bottom of a pond and breathe from a bubble of air stored around its body.

The American avocet is a shorebird that has an interesting way of protecting its nest. The avocet female lays her eggs on the ground in slight depressions in mud or grass. To protect such an exposed nest, a parent avocet screams an alarm whenever a predator is spotted. This call brings all the avocets together and as a group they drive the intruder away.

The muskrat is a common resident of wetlands. This rodent likes to feed on cattails, a plant that is abundant in marshes. Muskrats use cattails to build their lodges. A muskrat lodge looks like a small beaver lodge. Canada geese sometimes build their nests on top of muskrat lodges because this height provides the geese with a lookout for predators.

If you are a careful observer, you might see a garter snake swimming in the water. Garter snakes are found throughout Utah and are excellent swimmers. They eat insects, earthworms and frogs. These snakes can live for up to six years.

You won't want to miss one of the largest birds found in a marsh. The great blue heron has a wingspan of six feet! This bird uses its sharp bill to spear fish, frogs and snakes.



American avocet

Turn the page to explore the wild world of Utah's wetlands!

At Home in the Marsh

Where do these plants and animals live?

As you read the following poem, imagine that you are entering a marsh. Complete this marsh scene by drawing in the animals pictured below. Then, identify the plants in the drawing by writing the correct name by each. This passage was reprinted with the permission of Terry Tempest Williams from her book, *Between Cattails*.

The marsh is an edge
where water and land
meet between cattails.

To enter the marsh
we must separate
the cattails
with our fingers,

step down,
and watch
murky water
seep into our shoes.

We slowly sink
until only our ankles
are visible.

Layers of roots
and matted vegetation
are supporting us.

As the last cattails are parted,
the marsh opens
and we are looking across
wetlands, bodies of water
that sparkle and sing--

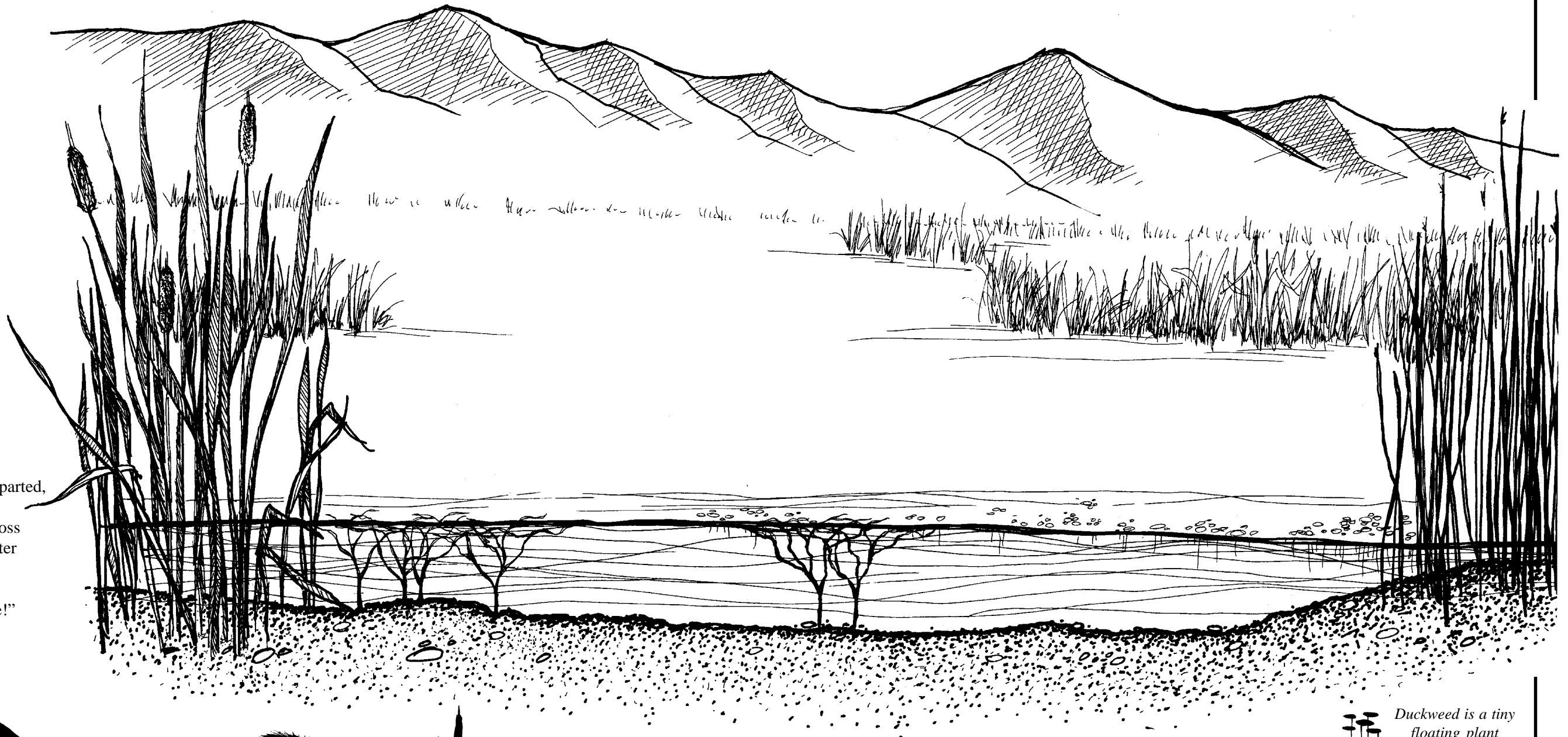
"Ko-ka-ree! Ko-ka-ree!"

Red-winged blackbirds
are singing
about home--

their home of
willow greens,
lily greens,
and water.

"Ko-ka-ree! Ko-ka-ree!"

We have found the marsh's pulse. . .



Red-winged blackbirds nest in cattails and bulrushes. The males have bright red shoulder patches.



Musk rats grow to be about 20" long. They build lodges out of cattails.



Cattails are eaten by muskrats and provide nesting sites for many marsh birds.



Cinnamon teal are common ducks in a marsh. They are named for their reddish-brown color.



Tiny midge larvae live underwater feeding on dead plants. Many animals eat midge larvae.



Garter snakes move easily on land or in water. They eat tadpoles, frogs and small fish.



Duckweed is a tiny floating plant eaten by ducks.



Dragonflies patrol wetlands in search of smaller insects like flies and midges.



Avocets sweep their long bills through shallow water to capture insects and other tiny animals.



Leopard frogs feed on many insects found in a marsh.



Pondweed seeds can survive long periods of drought.



Water boatmen can fly and swim. These aquatic insects eat algae.



Bulrushes are plants that grow in water. Their seeds are food for ducks and other marsh birds.

Complete this wetlands food web by using these animals: **midge larva, cinnamon teal, water shrew, leopard frog, peregrine falcon, muskrat, mink, great blue heron, common fly, garter snake, American avocet, water boatman.** Write the name of the animal on the line below the correct box. After naming the animals, color the circles and boxes. **Green** is for producers. **Blue** is for consumers. **Yellow** is for decomposers. Color the arrows **red**.

